

Book Review: The Afrotropical Scythrididae, Esperiana Memoir 7

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Received 19 August 2014; accepted 11 September 2014; published: 5 December 2014

Subject Editor: Jadranka Rota

Bengt Å. Bengtsson 2014: The Afrotropical Scythrididae, Esperiana Buchreihe zur Entomologie Memoir 7: 1–365. ISBN: 978-3-938249-05-5. Price: €125.

This book comes nicely bound, of a convenient size, with an ample supply of colour pages like others in the Esperiana Memoir series. The abstract details nine new synonymies and mentions that 191 new species are described out of the 307 treated.

There is a brief introduction to the family Scythrididae and an account of previous treatments of the family from the Afrotropical Region. All the localities taken from data labels of specimens examined are listed together with their longitude and latitude coordinates. There follows a section on Systematic aspects of the family and a list of genera with synonyms; no new genera are proposed. There is then a “Tentative systematic list” giving the names of all species to be treated in this work, these comprise six smaller genera: *Apostibes*, *Bactrianoscythris*, *Enolmis*, *Eretmocera*, *Haploscythris* and *Paralogistis*. Then the genus *Scythris* is divided into 18 species groups, after which are “Isolated species” which could not be grouped together with other species.

The bulk of the text then follows, comprising a description or redescription of each of the species, followed by a few photographs of localities and 23 pages of colour photographs of the adult specimens, and two of larvae. There are then 45 pages of monochrome photographs of male genitalia and 47 pages of female genitalia.

The species are all given a number and the illustrations are labelled with the same number, imagines with suffix -i, male genitalia with suffix -m, female genitalia with suffix -f with an additional suffix when more than one photograph was deemed necessary. This seems to be a sensible and helpful arrangement. Since the male genitalia are so diverse and difficult to interpret parts are labelled with arrows at times when the parts might be easily confused. All the photographs of adults are presented in a rectangle of the same size; it is easy in this computerised age for this to be done and they fit conveniently into a page. However even though a scale bar is included one does lose the sense of whether a species is a large or small one and I personally would prefer to have them reproduced at a constant scale.

The author has chosen type material to illustrate specimens whenever possible and this must be commended, and in the text the location of the holotype is specified.

Since I was asked to check the English I have to accept responsibility and not blame the author for one recurring error: the derivation of each new name is given under the heading “Ethymology” which of course should read Etymology.

No doubt a professional entomologist with more resources at his disposal would have had recourse to analysis of the DNA of some genera and species so that a robust structure for the

family could be attempted. He would no doubt have examined other collections such as those at Tervuren and elsewhere which was not attempted by this author. This work was compiled by a retired teacher who has also undertaken other works during the same decade. Scythrididae are not a group of great economic importance. Zhang B-C. (1994) in his *Index of Economically Important Lepidoptera* listed only two species of Scythrididae which had been mentioned in the economic literature, and both of them were from Asia. This means it is never likely that funding would be available for such a work as this.

A publication of this type does raise some deeper questions. The Afrotropical Region is vast; the Democratic Republic of Congo alone is the size of Western Europe. Scythrididae tend to inhabit semi-arid areas and Africa is a pretty arid continent, so the complete Scythridid fauna must be enormous, perhaps several times the 307 species described. It was a daunting task which the author embarked upon, but he has made a start and some of the species encountered can now be named. It is pleasing to have a book to handle in a traditional way, but to an African worker the cost might amount to a month's salary, even a museum or university in the Afrotropical Region might not be able to justify the outlay. Open access online publications, whilst less attractive to people of my generation, are certainly more likely to be consulted by someone working in Africa. We have a good grasp of the European fauna and it is natural for us to want to document the whole of life on earth, but the transition to tropical areas introduces a different order of scale; one wonders whether or not it can be achieved before that fauna is irretrievably damaged or destroyed.